

A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine



Palliser, Palliser and Company

The late nineteenth century was marked by repeated booms in domestic building construction which in Maine, as elsewhere in the country, led to a considerable need for design assistance. Builders were often found to be of little help in providing the latest and most fashionable designs, and the number of architects was limited, especially in the rural areas. An increasing number of popular magazines and professional journals offered some guidance, but seldom could they be relied upon to deal with the wide range of questions that inevitably arose as the potential client pondered the problem of how to go about building a house. The idea of providing architectural design by mail was developed to address this need.¹

The genesis of this type of architectural practice began with the activities of George Palliser (1848?-1903), an English immigrant who, after he was briefly engaged in sash, blind and door manufacturing in New Jersey, moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, in 1873.² Having gained the backing of two of that city's largest real estate investors, D. W. Sherwood and P. T. Barnum, Palliser provided dozens of designs for local subdivisions. These were primarily schemes for homes of low and moderate income families. Should the same wants arise elsewhere, the plans could readily be dupli-

cated. Given the tremendous need for architectural assistance, the generally held view that mail-order sales were the newest way to provide goods and services, and the nature of Palliser's previous work, it was not surprising that an enterprising architectural firm should adopt this mode of operation as its own.

Accordingly, George Palliser took the first step to notify the public of his services by publishing a thin 5" by 8" paperback booklet entitled *Palliser's Model Homes for the People. A Complete Guide to the Proper and Economical Erection of Buildings*. Available by October, 1876, it sold for only twenty-five cents. Forty-eight designs were presented, the majority in the Gothic mode, with others in the Mansardic and Italianate styles. Several of the schemes had already been built for the prices indicated in and around Bridgeport. However, neither the style of the designs nor their cost would become as important as the method which Palliser introduced. In his opening essay, entitled "Hints to the Building Public", he wrote:

In consequence of my increasing business, supplying parties in every section of the United States with designs, plans, specifications, etc., I find it is necessary to adopt a system for conducting this class of business, and which I trust will supply a want which has long been felt, especially in the country, where architects have done little business, and the people have been obliged to plan their own houses or copy from their neighbors, . . .



Figure 1. Double House, Lisbon Falls, 1986 view (MHPC).

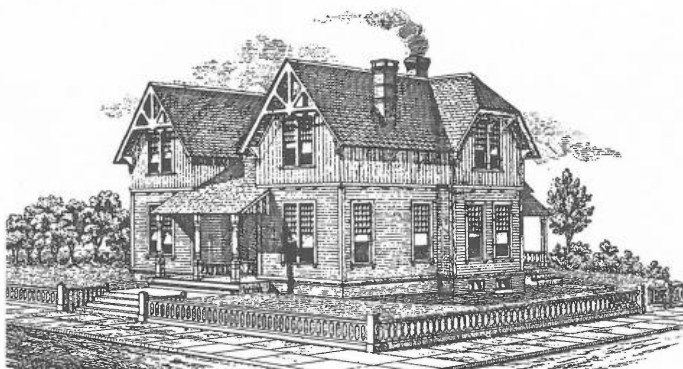


Figure 2. Design 39, *American Cottage Homes*, 1878.



Figure 3. Oakes House, Lubec, c. 1890 view (MHPC).

Palliser's practice quickly reached from coast to coast. Orders arrived daily from Sacramento, California to Boston, Massachusetts and beyond.

The next collection of designs was a handsome catalogue entitled *Palliser's American Cottage Homes*, which became available in January, 1878. This book was the result of the combined efforts of George and his younger brother Charles (1854-?), who had only

recently been admitted to the firm. The change in format from a small booklet to a clothbound quarto (10¾" by 14") volume, and the concurrent rise in price from twenty-five cents to \$5.00 was undoubtedly due to the publisher, Amos Jackson Bicknell. As the best-known architectural publisher and bookseller in America at the time, Bicknell gave the new book his characteristic flavor in the full title by which it was introduced: *Palliser's American Cottage Homes. 50 Designs of Modern Low Priced Cottages and Workingmen's Homes, Suitable for Erection in City, Suburbs and the Country: in North, South, and West*. In keeping with the layout favored by the publisher, each of the plates was presented on the right, while on the back of the preceding plate to the left, a sentence or two of description suggested the color and finish. Single and double cottages predominated. Indeed, the term "cottage" was used here to describe virtually every design, for most of the structures depicted were modest frame workingmen's residences, small in scale and simple in detail, despite the occasional addition of a gable or bay.

These extremely modest designs were employed by builders and clients throughout Maine. For example, a row of cottages in Lisbon Falls, built for mill employees, was derived from *American Cottage Homes* of 1878. Number 714 Topsham Road was built as a double house, each half with seven rooms (Figures 1 and 2), while the others are single family houses of six rooms each.³



Figure 4. Snow House, Rockland, c. 1890 view (Courtesy of Richard Warner).

Palliser's Model Homes. Showing a Variety of Designs for Model Dwellings: Also, a Farm-Barn and Hennery, Stable and Carriage House, School House, Masonic Association Building, Bank and Library, Town Hall and Three Churches became available in October, 1878. Returning to the small octavo format, this clothbound book of eighty-three pages sold for only \$1.00 and became popular enough to be re-issued once in Bridgeport and twice more in New York City for a total of 15,000 copies. Entirely new and much more elaborate designs were presented with a more descriptive text. Clear and precise engravings were used, surpassing in quality those of the Palliser's previous publications. Perhaps most noticeable was the widespread geographical distribution of the buildings constructed according to these schemes: from Connecticut to Iowa, and from Virginia to Mississippi. This was a truly calculated demonstration of the success of their mail-order practice. In fact, by the time *Model Homes* (1878) was re-issued in November, 1883, the authors could boast that many of the designs had been "built as often as twenty to fifty times to our certain knowledge". An early example in Maine which features decorative trim popularly known as the "Stick Style" is the Oakes House in Lubec. Its circa 1880 construction date makes it one of the earliest Palliser houses in the state, as well as one of the most splendidly sited (Figure 3). Similar detailing was used for the Snow House in Rockland of 1886 (Figure 4).

It is possible to follow the evolution of a scheme in the publications, and its appearance on city streets and country roads. The earliest Palliser design which has



Figure 5. Design 24, *American Cottage Homes*, 1878.

been identified in Maine is that employed for the William Moulton House in South Berwick (Figure 5). This plan is a copy of Design 22 in *Palliser's Model Homes for the People* (1876), a scheme which was republished as Design 24 in *Palliser's American Cottage Homes* (1878). Because the Moulton House was built about 1885, it is more likely that the latter was the source.

This design was revised and appeared as Plate VI



Figure 6. Leavitt House, Sherman Mills, 1986 view (MHPC).

in *Palliser's Model Homes* (1878). A bay window was added on the side, another room was incorporated on each floor, and the exterior detail was updated. The A. B. Leavitt House, built about 1890 in Sherman Mills in Aroostook County, is probably the most intact example of this design in Maine (Figure 6). It is interesting to note that, although this was undoubtedly considered a "modern house", the Palliser firm followed a traditional New England farmhouse plan and extended the building to the rear so that the kitchen ell is attached to the carriage barn. The Henry A. Stone House, built about 1883-84 at the other end of the state in South Berwick, is another example of the same design, although some of the original detail was simplified.

The firm's next publication, *Palliser's Useful Details*, while copyrighted in 1880, was probably not released until early in 1881. As might be expected from the title, this was a thoroughly practical work. Here were forty full folio size (20" by 26") plates without any descriptive text. Instead, included were designs for such elements as gates, posts, walls, inside doors with casings, mantels, bookcases, gables, and tables, some drawn to half full-size, others at three-quarter inch to the foot. The contents clearly suggested the cumulative amount of attention which the firm had spent in developing these details and recalled George Palliser's early involvement in sash, door and blind manufacturing. The cost of this collection was only \$3.00. Reissued in 1883 and again in 1890, it topped the circulation record of any Palliser's works at 50,000 copies. In Maine, Bangor's *Industrial Journal* for February 22, 1884, devoted a brief article to *Palliser's Useful Details*, lauding it as "the best work of its kind ever issued . . . The ideas of designs need not be used as a whole; the parts being complete in themselves, they can be obtained

so as to produce different results."⁴ Just how many times "Palliser porches" or "Palliser pediments" were added to existing buildings will never be known. An example is the Simonton House in Camden, which was remodelled with a Palliser-designed porch and dormers about 1891 (Figure 7).

Palliser's Modern Eight-Room Cottage, with Tower was produced independently of any text in printed plans, elevations and details (Figure 8). These were made available for only fifty cents. Over 75,000 copies of this Queen Anne style scheme were sold, resulting in some towns having two or three examples with slightly different finish. This design was built several times in Maine. In Saco the Benjamin Hall House of about 1881 is perhaps the most intact example. With the exception of modern storm sash, the entire building stands as it was originally built, and the half timbering in the gable ends, the shingles on the second story, and the clapboard on the first level all correspond to the published design.

Another example is the cottage built in 1883 for George Barron in Bar Harbor. Barron was a local building contractor and lumber yard owner, and thus may have been familiar with the Pallisers' publications. In Waterville, the Clark Caswell House, built about 1883, provides a third example of the "Modern Cottage", although it is unfortunately covered in siding, which hides whatever detail woodwork may exist. Variations of this scheme can also be found in Sanford.

By 1882 the Palliser firm had grown and achieved such prominence that the decision was made to move to New York City. The move does not seem to have been actually completed, however, until late in 1885. Soon after settling in, the finishing touches were made on yet another publication: *Palliser's New Cottage Homes and Details, Containing Nearly Two Hundred and Fifty New and Original Designs in All the Modern Styles, showing Plans, Elevations, Perspective Views of Low-priced, Medium and First Class Cottages, Villas, Farm Houses, Town and Country Places, Houses for the Seashore, the South, and for Summer and Winter Resorts, etc., etc., City Brick Block Houses, Farm Barns, Stables and Carriage Houses and 1500 Detailed Drawings, Descriptive and Instructive Letter Press, also Specifications and Form of Contract*. This work was without a doubt the most extensive collection of new designs the firm would produce. It also captured some of the firm's best work. Many of the designs date from 1882-83, before the company moved to New York City, although the book was not published until 1887.

In general, the firm's work was becoming more simplified in outline and detail, especially in cases where clients personally commissioned designs instead of purchasing already available ones. Examples in Maine include the Episcopal rectory for St. Paul's Church on Pleasant Street in Brunswick, constructed in 1881 (Figure 9). Built on a smaller lot near the church, the total cost of the land and the building slightly exceeded \$6,000. The house was originally painted in two shades of dark olive green, with red roofs and olive beading on the ridge poles; the doors and window



Figure 7. Simonton House, Camden, 1896 view (MHPC).

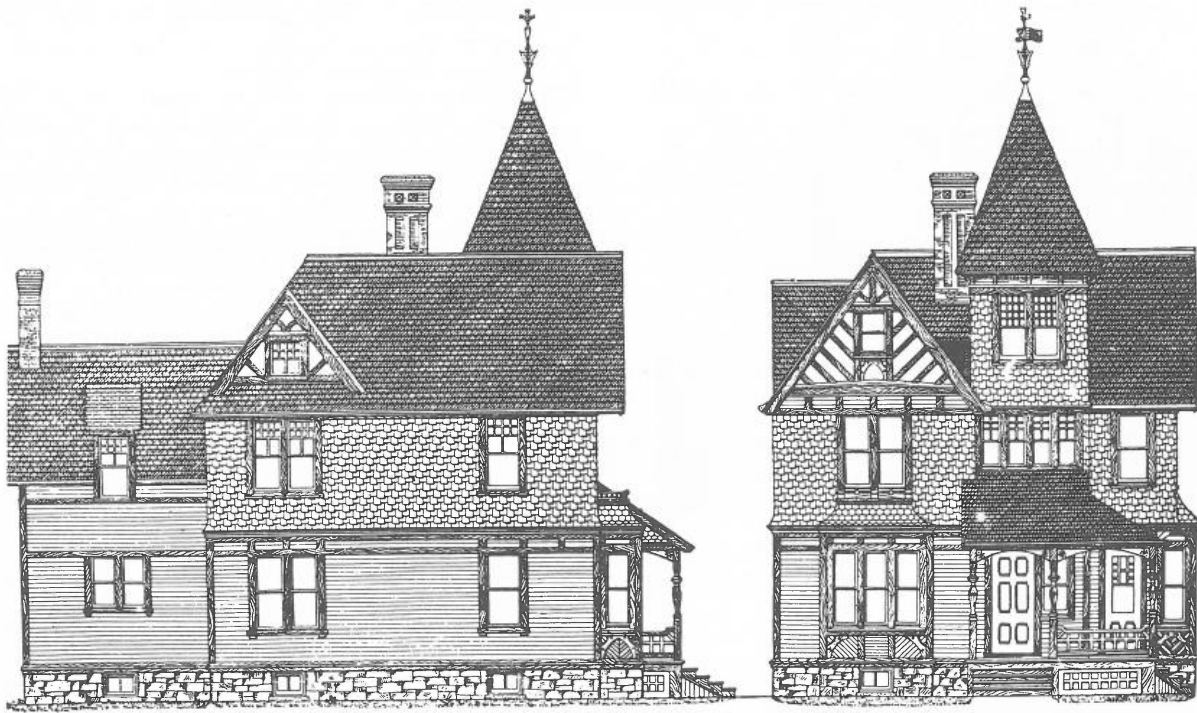


Figure 8. Front and Side Elevations, *Palliser's Modern Eight-Room Cottage, with Tower*.

sashes were painted bronze green. The same design was used for the Lewellyn Morse House in Bangor, constructed in 1882. Each is a remarkably intact, hipped roof frame residence, with a clapboarded first story and shingled second story. Like much of Palliser's work, Queen Anne style detailing predominated.

Once established in New York City, the leadership of the firm changed as the two brothers apparently parted professionally. In 1889 Palliser, Palliser and Company was still listed at 24 East 42nd Street, as was Charles. The office address of George Palliser, however, was given as 134 Park Avenue. The degree to which the senior practitioner was henceforth involved with the firm is uncertain, for he seems to have been pre-occupied to a large extent with his own work.⁵ The activities of Charles Palliser, on the other hand, apparently continued to be tied quite closely to the Company.

With the separation of the two principals, the publications of the firm declined appreciably. In 1888, for example, the firm gave J. S. Ogilvie, a well-known publisher of popular novels and cheap, general audience paperbacks, the responsibility for another work, *Palliser's American Architecture: or, Every Man a Complete Builder*. The book was anything but new. Ogilvie merely interleaved the plates of *American Cottage Homes* and those of *Model Homes*, republishing them under a new title. It was, however, quite successful, for its sales approached 35,000 copies.

Other books, compilations of designs both old and new, were published by Ogilvie for Palliser, Palliser and Company, but these publications were very simply samplers. Institutional designs were collected under titles such as *Palliser's Common Sense School Architecture*, first published in 1889, and *Palliser's Court Houses, Village, Town and City Halls*, which also appeared in 1889. Two other books, *Public Statues and Monuments of New York*, and *Palliser's Memorials and Headstones*, both published in 1891, round out the inexpensive portfolios that were assembled. While a great many designs from these late publications, particularly *Model Dwellings* of 1892 or 93, were used in Maine, they are often either variations of earlier schemes or are barely distinguishable from the work of other competitors in the mail order field who followed George Palliser's lead in this method of providing architectural services.⁶

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Figure 9. Episcopal Rectory, Brunswick, 1986 view (MHPC).

NOTES

- ¹ Probably sparked by the dozens of mail-order newspapers, which were sweeping the country, the first of which, *The People's Literary Companion*, was begun in Augusta, Maine, in 1869, it seemed to be a logical manner in which to address the problem.
- ² This history of the influence of the Palliser firm is based on the author's previous research. See Tomlan, Michael A., "Popular and Professional American Architectural Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century", Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1983 and "The Palliser Brothers and Their Publications", *The Pallisers' Late Victorian Architecture*, Watkins Glen, New York: American Life Foundation, 1978.
- ³ The Worumbo Manufacturing Company built these cottages and owned them until 1940. No documentation has come to light regarding when they were built, but they probably date from the early 1880s.
- ⁴ *Industrial Journal*, Bangor, February 22, 1884, p. 6.
- ⁵ After moving from Bridgeport, George Palliser had briefly resided in Irvington, New York, but in January, 1888, he took a cottage on Hudson Terrace in the village of Dobbs Ferry. Here the architect would establish a considerable reputation of his own, designing the county children's hospital, several school buildings, a number of cottages, and his own residence on hillside property overlooking the town.
- ⁶ Tomlan, "Popular and Professional American Architectural Literature in the Late Nineteenth Century", *op. cit.*, pp. 315-337.

List of Known Commissions in Maine by Palliser, Palliser and Company

- Edwin F. Dillingham Cottage, Dillingham Point, Camden, 1880, Altered. Published as Design 74, *Model Dwellings* (1893). Spencer Mero, Builder.
- A. Oakes House, Lubec, c. 1880, Altered. Source: Design 40, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).

- Episcopal Rectory, 13 Pleasant Street, Brunswick, 1881, Extant. Source: Identical design to Lewellyn Morse House, W. F. Glove & Company, Builders.
- Benjamin Hall House, Academy Street, Saco, c. 1881, Extant. Source: "Palliser's Modern Eight-Room Cottage with Tower".
- Lewellyn Morse House, 26 Kenduskeag Avenue, Bangor, 1882, Extant. Source: *American Architect and Building News*, July 1, 1882, p. 12.
- George Barron House, 31 Hancock Street, Bar Harbor, 1883, Extant. Source: "Palliser's Modern Eight-Room Cottage with Tower". C. A. Wallace, Builder.
- Clark R. Caswell House, 48 Silver Street, Waterville, c. 1883, Altered. Source: "Palliser's Eight-Room Cottage with Tower".
- Henry A. Stone House, 64 Paul Street, South Berwick, c. 1883-84, Altered. Source: Plate VI, *Model Homes* (1878).
- William Moulton House, 15 Goodwin Street, South Berwick, c. 1885, Extant. Source: Design 22, *Model Homes for the People* (1876).
- Double House at 714-18 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Extant. Source: Design 39, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 704 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Altered. Source: Design 11, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 708 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Altered. Source: Design 16, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 710 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Extant. Source: Design 16, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 716 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Extant. Source: Design 11, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 718 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Extant. Source: Design 16, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 722 Topsham Road, Lisbon Falls, c. 1880-85, Extant. Source: Design 11, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- Snow House, 57 Talbot Avenue, Rockland, 1886, Altered. Source: Plate III, *Model Homes* (1878).
- Lewis Wilbur House, 13 Pleasant Street, Phillips, 1886, Extant. Published as Design 125, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- William Bibber House, 39 Pleasant Street, Richmond, 1887, Extant. Published as Design 125, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- Alva Leavett House, Sherman Mills, c. 1890, Extant. Source: Plate VI, *Model Homes* (1878). Chester Coburn, Builder.
- Everett Simonton House, 59 Elm Street, Camden, c. 1891, Extant. Source: Design 18, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- Edward E. Hussey House, 16 School Street, Sanford, c. 1892, Extant. Published as Design 57, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- John Moriarity House, 38 Portland Street, Yarmouth, c. 1895, Altered. Source: Design 4, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- C. H. Ricker House, 316 South Main Street, Caribou, c. 1895, Extant. Source: Design 17, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- R. A. Shaw House, 365 South Main Street, Caribou, c. 1895, Extant. Source: Design 45, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- House at 62 Bosworth Street, Milford, c. 1890s, Altered. Source: Design 42, *American Cottage Homes* (1878).
- House at 19 High Street, Old Town, c. 1890s, Extant. Source: Design 56, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- Double House at 74-76 School Street, Saco, c. 1890s, Extant. Source: Design 65, *Model Dwellings* (1893).
- House at 20 Payne Street, Springvale, c. 1890s, Altered. Source: Plate III, *Model Homes* (1878).
- House at 36 Pleasant Street, Springvale, c. 1890s, Altered. Source: Plate III, *Model Homes* (1878).
- Charles Wood House, 139 Main Street, Orono, c. 1900, Extant. Source: Design 73, *Model Dwellings* (1893).

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